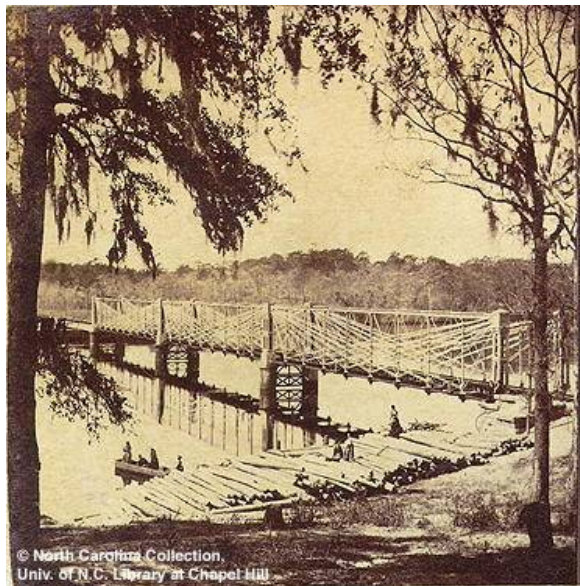


Messenger followed the activity of the WLI's rapid-fire gun closely.



Railroad bridge at Hilton
Image: North Carolina Collection, University of
North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Yet another group of people also made their way into the melee in Brooklyn—they were mostly armed white citizens and reporters.⁹³ Clawson, along with other reporters who were in town to cover the election, ventured into Brooklyn to witness the fighting. In a later account of the fighting, Clawson wrote that he was particularly impressed by the machine gun squad. He attributed squad leadership to Roger Moore and William Rand Kenan and

⁹³ Most of the men involved in the first shots were those who lived in the transitional neighborhoods dividing the white and black citizenry in Brooklyn, and the others who filtered in after the first shots were outsiders from other parts of town or members of the WLI or other paramilitary organizations. S. Hill Terry lived at 815 North Fourth Street, Theodore Curtis boarded at 712 North Fourth Street, and Sam Matthews lived at 917 North Fourth Street. 1897 *Wilmington City Directory*; Higuchi 1897 map of Wilmington.

wrote that the two “heroic figures” led the “spectacular action of the machine gun outfit.” Clawson further recalled: “I have yet a vivid mental picture of these two magnificent Wilmingtonians as they grimly stood upright by their machine gun.” The gun was mounted on a large horse-drawn truck and was drawn “at a rapid rate through every section of Brooklyn.” He indicated that the men paused with the machine gun for a photo and then were rushed off to a section of the city where they were needed. The photo shows that some of the men wore portions of their active duty military uniforms from the Naval Reserves and Company K. Clawson was proud of the squad for their bravery since they were exposed to sniper fire, and, since they were among the first to be on the scene after the fighting began, the machine gun squad had “the situation well in hand when the military companies arrived.” He firmly believed that bloodshed would have been much more significant without the presence of the “flying machine-gun squadron.”⁹⁴

The rapid-fire guns were used to intimidate men on the streets, and to force compliance of African American churches. Churches, at the heart of the black community, helped communicate information and were seen as an organizational threat to whites. Rumors heard by leaders of the WLI held that the churches were used as arsenals, ready to equip black men with weapons to return fire at the whites. Therefore, at an early stage, the machine guns targeted all the churches and forced ministers to open their doors to searches by whites. At St. Stephens A.M.E. Church on the corner of Fifth and Red Cross Streets, one of the largest churches in the city with a congregation nearing 1,600 members, the crew aimed the rapid-fire gun at the church’s main entrance and threatened to open fire. The church leaders opened the

⁹⁴ Clawson, “Recollections and Memories.”